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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS SEVENTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

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Addendum

IV. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

B. Consideration of reports

1. Initial reports of States parties

Armenia

1. The Committee considered the initial report of Armenia (CEDAW/C/ARM/1 and Corr.1) at its 344th, 345th and 349th meetings, on 14 and 16 July 1997.

2. The representative of Armenia emphasized that after the declaration of independence in 1991, Armenia had begun the implementation of economic and political reforms. The process of transition to market economy had been affected by the blockade of the main transportation routes, a severe energy crisis and the damage inflicted by the devastating earthquake of 1988. Despite social and economic difficulties, the Government of Armenia attached great importance to the international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which it had acceded in 1993 without reservations. In order to secure the sufficient implementation of the Convention, the Government had started to carry out legal reforms aimed at adjusting existing legislation to international norms and standards specified in that instrument. The Committee was informed that the

Fourth World Conference on Women had marked a turning point for women's rights in Armenia.

3. The representative noted that the initial report had been submitted to the Secretariat in 1995. He noted that the report had been prepared during the period of economic and political restructuring and the blockade on goods, services and energy imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey and in a situation of continuing conflict between Nagorny Karabakh and Azerbaijan.

4. The report had been prepared in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health and appropriate commissions of the National Assembly. The corrigendum, dated 11 February 1997, replaced part of the original report and reflected changes resulting from the adoption of the Constitution in 1995, developments in the legal framework and actual conditions for Armenian women.

5. The representative informed the Committee that there was no special institution responsible for the protection of women's rights. The Ministry for Social Security and the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights were the main institutions that were currently responsible for women's issues in the country.

6. The representative of Armenia outlined the political, economic and legal situation in Armenia and their impact on the status of women. The Committee was informed that the new Constitution underscored the principle of equality of human rights of women and men. Legally, women enjoyed full guarantees against discrimination but the difficult social-economic situation in the country had not always allowed their full implementation. The difficult social-economic situation, which had resulted in a drastic decline in the standard of living, an increase in the unemployment rate and impoverishment, had affected women more than men. Hence, the Parliament had adopted in 1991 a resolution on urgent measures for the protection of women, maternity and childhood and the strengthening of the family, which granted supplementary rights to women and mothers, especially single mothers, in the areas of work and social security. A national programme of action had been launched, inter alia, to disseminate laws on protection of women's rights and to establish information and legal counselling services.

7. In Armenia, a majority of women had achieved a high level of education and often outnumbered men in the area of higher education. However, women accounted for a higher level of unemployment than men and occupied few positions at all levels of decision-making. Women in the labour market were usually concentrated in traditional female occupations. In spite of low representation of women in governmental positions, they were active in social and economic life. During recent years, more than 30 women's organizations had emerged in the country and covered a wide spectrum of issues, including the preparation of women for leadership roles in society and the protection of their rights.

8. With regard to women's reproductive health, the representative noted that women had the right to abortion until the fourteenth week of pregnancy. However, the representative informed the Committee that in reality abortion was the primary method of birth control in Armenia and there was a lack of family

planning services. The Government was taking measures to disseminate information about contraceptives and to improve their availability.

9. The representative indicated that the Government of Armenia was particularly concerned about the large number of refugees in the country, with women constituting the majority. He informed the Committee that the Government was implementing a wide set of measures aimed at their integration in social and economic life.

10. The representative concluded that the Government of Armenia recognized that much remained to be done in order to achieve full equality between women and men. He assured the Committee of the willingness of the Government to continue to undertake all the necessary measures to implement the principles of the Convention.

General observations

Introduction

11. The Committee welcomed the presentation by the Government of Armenia and commended it on its ratification of the Convention without reservations so soon after independence in 1991 and on the timely submission of the initial report, which contained detailed information on the implementation of the Convention in accordance with the Committee's guidelines. It expressed its appreciation of the willingness of the representatives of Armenia to engage in an open, candid constructive dialogue with the Committee.

Positive aspects

12. The Committee commended the Government on its effort to carry out reform of its laws so as to align them with the standards of international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

13. It noted with satisfaction the incorporation of the Convention in domestic law, and its precedence over conflicting national legislation, and expressed its appreciation of the fact that the Government had translated the Convention into Armenian and disseminated it widely.

14. The Committee acknowledged favourably the statement made by the representative of Armenia as to the intention to introduce a fundamental legal reform within the ongoing revision of the criminal code, in respect of violence against women and their sexual exploitation through prostitution and trafficking.

15. The Committee applauded the exceptionally high level of literacy and education in Armenia, in particular among women.

16. The Committee commended the Government on its identification of four priority areas of concern in relation to women's health, and on its programme to establish a system of family planning services and to provide contraceptives to women free of charge.

Factors and difficulties impeding implementation of the Convention

17. The Committee noted the adverse effect of the process of democratization on the position of women in Armenia, in terms of their dramatic loss of representation at all levels of decision-making.

18. The Committee also noted that the process of transition to a market economy appeared to have resulted in the economic marginalization of women, and that that had been exacerbated by the economic toll of the 1988 earthquake, and the armed conflict around Nagorny Karabakh.

19. Deep concern was expressed about cultural stereotypes which overemphasized the traditional role of women as mothers in a protective and restrictive way.

Principal areas of concern

20. The Committee expressed and reiterated its gravest concern about the absence of a specific national machinery for the advancement of women and the elimination of discrimination against women.

21. The Committee was extremely concerned that the Government of Armenia had failed to acknowledge and address the matter of violence against women, which appeared to be a subject of taboo in Armenian society, although there were many indicators of it being as serious a problem as in other societies.

22. The Committee was also extremely concerned about the high rate of unemployment (over 60 per cent according to the report), the occupational segregation of women in low-paying sectors and the small number of women in positions at the senior management level.

23. In connection with the economic marginalization of women and their position in the labour market, the Committee expressed its concern about indications of the increasing economic activities of women in the informal sector (sometimes referred to as suitcase trading), without appropriate measures of legal security, including work benefits.

24. The Committee also noted with concern the paternalistic restrictions imposed by the labour laws, which were aimed at protecting maternity and resulted in the legal limitation of women's employment opportunities and choices.

25. Similarly, the Committee was concerned with the Government's report of increasing prostitution, especially in relation to the limited economic options for women in Armenia, as well as in respect of the access of women engaging in prostitution to appropriate health services, including for the prevention and care of HIV/AIDS.

26. In respect to the subject of women's health, the Committee expressed its deep concern regarding statements made by the representative of Armenia to the effect that the Government was considering proposals for privatization as part of a reform of the health system. The Committee emphasized the harmful effects

on vulnerable groups of privatization in the health area, even in highly developed countries.

Recommendations and suggestions

27. The Committee strongly urges the Government of Armenia to establish a national machinery for the advancement of women, with fully adequate staff and resources, so as to integrate the perspective of women's human rights and gender analysis into all ongoing policy making and strategic development planning activities.

28. The Committee recommends that the Government take temporary special measures of affirmative action to create employment opportunities for women, including special credit and loan programmes for women entrepreneurs.

29. The Committee also recommends that temporary special measures be adopted to remedy the severe decrease in the political representation of women since independence, and to increase their participation in all areas of public life.

30. The Committee further recommends that the Government give due attention to the subject of violence against women, by encouraging a public discussion of its various forms, initiating appropriate legislation, training law enforcement officers, judges and health professionals (including adequate numbers of female personnel) to identify and manage the manifestations of violence against women, and by guaranteeing that the necessary psycho-social and health services are available to victims of violence, with particular attention to internally displaced and refugee women.

31. The Committee strongly urges the Government to use the education system and the electronic media to combat the traditional stereotype of women "in the noble role of mother" and to raise awareness of the role of men in caring and their responsibility for parenting.

32. The Committee suggests that there is a strong need to collect information and gender disaggregated data in all areas, and in particular as regards violence against women, prostitution and health.

33. The Committee requests the Government to address the concerns included in the present comments in its next report, and to include information on the implementation of the Committee's general recommendations, particularly general recommendation 19 on violence against women. It also requests the wide dissemination of these comments throughout Armenia.